



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Polio Vaccine

BISMARCK, N.D. – On April 12, North Dakota is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first polio vaccine. Since the introduction of the vaccine, great strides have been made in significantly reducing the health impact of vaccine-preventable diseases in children and adults worldwide.

The vaccine breakthrough, driven by Dr. Jonas Salk, brought together communities in a national collaboration that at that time was the largest human cooperative effort in history. In the days leading up to the vaccine's approval, children in communities across the United States, including North Dakota, participated in the field trials as America's "Polio Pioneers." During 1954, three counties in North Dakota participated in the field trials. A total of 1,664 second graders in Cass, Burleigh and Morton counties were vaccinated. Millions also participated by raising funds in their communities to support the larger research effort and a single goal: victory over polio.

"The last polio case reported in North Dakota was in 1977, and it was eliminated from the Americas in 1994," said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D., M.P.H.T.M. "But the disease still circulates in Asia and Africa, paralyzing the world's most vulnerable children. Polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases are only a plane-ride away. That is why it is so important to maintain high immunization rates."

Before the introduction of the vaccine, 16,000 cases of paralytic polio occurred in the United States each year. Polio was eliminated in the United States because protecting the public was perceived as a simple necessity, and every effort was made to see that the vaccine would be freely distributed and polio would be eradicated. Since this effort 50 years ago, children can now be protected against more than 12 vaccine-preventable diseases and disease rates have been

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reduced by 99 percent in the United States. Without diligent efforts to maintain immunization programs here and strengthen them worldwide, the diseases seen 50 years ago remain a threat to our children.

For more information about the 50th anniversary of polio vaccine, contact Molly Sander, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

-- 30 --

Please note: Historical photos illustrating the polio vaccine are available for download at <http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/marchofdimes/21513/>.

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